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IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

No. 305

WALTER W. BURNS,

Petitioner,

vs.

OLIVER L. SPILLER, STEWART M. GRAYSON, ARLINGTON A. McCALLUM, LeROY S. MANN, *et al.*,

Respondents.

PETITION FOR REVIEW ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI OF A DECISION OF THE COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

WALTER W. BURNS,
Petitioner.

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TOWER BUILDING

SUBJECT INDEX.

PAGE

Summary and Short Statement of Matter Involved 1
Statement of Basis for Jurisdiction 4
The Questions Presented 9
Reasons Relied on for the Allowance of the Writ 10

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES RELIED ON.

Cases.

DeArnaud v. Ainsworth, 24 App. D. C. 167; 32 Wash. Law Rep. 662 4
Dinsman v. Wilkes, reported in 7 Howard 89 and 12 Howard 390 ..... 7, 8, 11

Statutes.

Section 240(a) of the Act of February 13, 1925, Chapter 229, 43 Stat. 936 4
Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940, as amended 11
Sec. 5, Section 205 12
Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1941, (Approved October 17, 1940), Sec. 205 12

Miscellaneous.

Articles I, II and VI of the Amendments to the Constitution of the United States 7, 11
Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 9
Rule 8(a) 7, 10

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PETITION FOR REVIEW ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI OF A DECISION OF THE COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

Petitioner, Walter W. Burns, petitions this Court for review on writ of certiorari of a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in the above-entitled cause, made on March 4, 1947, the petition for rehearing having been denied on May 29, 1947.

Summary and Short Statement of Matter Involved.

The petitioner was a Colonel on active duty in the Army of the United States. The respondents were also officers in the Army of the United States, the respondent Spiller being a Brigadier General, and therefore ranking the remainder of the respondents, and the petitioner.

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did wrongfully and maliciously conspire to and did unlawfully have petitioner incarcerated in William Beaumont General Hospital, at El Paso, Texas.

The complaint further sets forth that the respondents did maliciously and wrongfully, after being told by the hospital authorities, that there was nothing mentally wrong with the petitioner, submit false reports about petitioner, the respondents having full knowledge that the reports submitted were false, these reports being submitted for the purpose of prolonging the false imprisonment of the petitioner, which reports did actually prolong the false imprisonment of the petitioner and respondents did order subordinates to "get him (petitioner) on something" or words of like import. (Joint App. 3.)

The complaint further sets forth that the respondents did issue and cause to be issued malicious and unlawful military orders preventing persons under military jurisdiction from talking or otherwise communicating with the petitioner, which orders have not to this time been revoked, vacated or rescinded. (Joint App. 3.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did conspire to threaten petitioner and cause petitioner to be threatened with a Class "B" efficiency board unless petitioner would cease attempting to have himself declared of sound mind by the Medical Authorities of William Beaumont General Hospital, El Paso, Texas. (Joint App. 4.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did cause to have a meeting of petitioner's officers at which, with respondent Mann in charge, did have respondent McCallum speak falsely and maliciously against petitioner stating

that petitioner had committed a terrible crime. (Joint App. 4.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did maliciously conspire to have petitioner put off of active duty with the Army of the United States on the ground that petitioner had high blood pressure (Joint App. 5.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did have a false and malicious report published that the petitioner did perform a "solo" dance. (Joint App. 5.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did cause to be issued a malicious and illegal written order forbidding petitioner to speak to certain civilians in the City of El Paso, Texas, and in the order recognized that there was a question as to the validity of the order under the Constitution of the United States, which written order did not permit the questioning of the validity of the order by petitioner at the time of the issue of the order but only at a future time. (Joint App. 5.)

The complaint sets forth that the respondents did conspire with malicious threats against petitioner to give him a secret trial without sufficient time to defend himself, unless the petitioner should resign from the Army of the United States, at the same time preventing the petitioner from obtaining information which might have helped petitioner to defend himself. (Joint App. 6.)

The complaint also sets forth that the respondents did maliciously and wrongfully interfere with the properly addressed first-class mail of the petitioner by opening same, and did prevent delivery of some of said mail to petitioner. (Joint App. 6.)

Statement of Basis for Jurisdiction.

Authority for jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of the United States in the matter of this petition is found in Section 240(a) of the Act of February 13, 1925, Chapter 229, 43 Stat. 936, reading as follows:

> "Sec. 240 (a) In any case, civil or criminal, in a Circuit Court of Appeals, or in the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia, it shall be competent for the Supreme Court of the United States, upon the petition of any party thereto, whether Government or other litigant, to require by certiorari, either before or after a judgment or decree by such lower court, that the cause be certified to the Supreme Court for determination by it with the same power and authority, and with like effect, as if the cause had been brought there by unrestricted writ of error or appeal."

The reasons why it is submitted that the Supreme Court of the United States should review this cause are as follows:

1. The questions involved are of general importance. These are whether the statements and acts of officers of the United States are privileged, even though such statements or acts are malicious.

(a) In support of this point, your petitioner states that he attempted to employ the best known lawyer on military matters and was told by this lawyer that he had had over forty officers seek his services where apparently no one of them was insane yet had been so charged by a superior officer; that he had informed them all that the courts of the District of Columbia would hold that all acts of officers of the United States were privileged under the case DeArnaud v. Ainsworth, 24 App. D. C. 167; 32 Wash. Law Rep. 662.

(b) Your petitioner states that he has had nearly 200 somewhat similar cases called to his attention, this being due in part to the publicity given by the newspapers to the instant case. Some of the cases which petitioner has had time to investigate are as follows:

(1) A lieutenant called in by his commanding officer, was told he had been accused of a terrible crime; the Colonel refusing either to name the accusors or the criminal act, held the lieutenant incommunicado not only until he resigned but until the resignation had been accepted. The lieutenant was refused permission to enlist in the U. S. Service. He enlisted in the Canadian Army and fought in Germany until surrender.

(2) The Chaplain of the aforementioned lieutenant was ordered by the Commanding Officer to not speak to the lieutenant. The Chaplain insisted upon doing so and was then given a Class "B" reclassification board and was put out of the Army. This cost him his church and he had to accept employment making blue prints for a living.

(3) A National Guard officer was separated from the active service under honorable conditions, and although in a retired status, was a civilian instructor in military subjects at a university. A Regular Army officer who disliked the National Guard officer on hearing of this, got in touch with the University and informed them that their instructor was "not a fit person to be on a University faculty." The instructor's resignation was demanded at once, despite the fact that the instructor's name was supplied at the War Department. The National Guard officer (retired) is your petitioner.

(4) A recent West Point graduate, a major, had never even talked with his commanding general although he was on his general's staff. The young man did something he be-

lieved he had a right under regulations to do but it offended the General. The General without any hearing placed him in a neuro-psychiatric ward and the doctor whose efficiency reports passed over the general's desk, approved the general's charge of the Major having an unsound mind and the Major was put off of active duty. The Major wrote your petitioner that his General was General Spiller.

(5) A nurse with rank of lieutenant refused to be a "GI Wife" for the duration and cohabit with the officers. She was placed in a neuro-psychiatric ward and the psychiatrist—a medical major was ordered to fix up a mental diagnosis on her. He came to the lieutenant with his chief nurse and informed her that her colonel had ordered him to make the diagnosis. He informed her he would not do so and sent her back to the States.

(6) A Medical Officer with rank of Lieut. Col., in charge of a medical unit overseas was ordered to watch and report progress on the structures being put up nearby, it being understood that on completion of the new construction, his unit was to occupy the structures. At first, he was able to report real progress being made. Later, a new construction battalion was sent to take over the construction. The Medical Officer then had to report that not much progress was being made. He was told repeatedly by his superior that reports of *progress* were desired. As the Medical Officer had no authority over the battalion doing the construction, he felt that he had to report the truth. After being several times criticized for not reporting progress, he was placed in a psychiatric ward and for about two years was forced to fight for a favorable ruling on his sanity, which he finally obtained. In the meantime, his services were a dead loss to the Government.

2. The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia made its decision on a point which had been

raised in the District Court but the opinion of the lower court was not based on that point—that the amended complaint did not comply with Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 8(a) which requires that the complaint contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief."

3. The United States Court of Appeals omitted to pass on either one of the two points upon which the appeal was taken; these being the two points on which the lower court based its opinion. These are as follows:

(a) the statements against petitioner were privileged.

(b) the statements are barred by the statute of limitations. (Joint App. 9.)

By refusing to pass upon these points, your petitioner was denied any right of appeal which he might have had to appeal from any holding on petitioner's rights under Articles I, II and VI of the amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

The refusal of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to pass upon the points upon which the appeal was taken, it is submitted, is a departure from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings.

4. The following statement was made in the decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia:

> "Though it (the complaint) characterizes appellees' alleged conduct as wrongful, unlawful and malicious, it does not sufficiently disclose the conduct to enable a court to judge whether or not it was tortious."

This it is submitted is a failure to give proper effect to the law as laid down in the case of Dinsman v. Wilkes, reported in 7 Howard 89 and 12 Howard 390. In delivering

the opinion of the Supreme Court of the United States, Mr. Justice Woodbury said, 7 Howard 89, in part:

> "It is not lost sight of however, * * * that while the chief agent of the Government in so important a trust, when conducting with skill, fidelity and energy, is to be protected under mere errors of judgment in the discharge of his duties, yet he is not to be shielded from responsibility if he acts out of his authority or jurisdiction or inflicts private injury either from malice, cruelty or any species of oppression, founded upon considerations independent of public ends.
>
> "The humblest seaman or marine is to be sheltered under the aegis of the law from any real wrong, as well as the highest in office."

The second time this same case came before the United States Supreme Court, in 12 Howard 390, Mr. Justice Taney, delivering the opinion of the court, had this to say, in part:

> "But at the same time, it must be borne in mind that the nation would be equally dishonored, if it permitted the humblest individual in the service to be oppressed and injured by his commanding officer from malice or ill will or the wantonness of power, without giving him redress in the courts of justice.
>
> "*The case turns on the motive* which induced Captain Wilkes to inflict the punishments complained of and *this question is one exclusively for the jury—to be decided by them upon the whole testimony* and the rule of law by which they must be governed in making up their verdict is contained in a single proposition. It is this:
>
> "If they believe from the whole testimony that the defendant, in all the acts complained of, was actuated alone by an upright intention to maintain the discipline of his command and the interest of the service in which he was engaged, then the plaintiff is not entitled to recover. But if they find that the punishment of the plaintiff was in any manner or in any degree increased or aggravated by malice or a vindicative feeling to-

wards him, on the part of Captain Wilkes or by a disposition to oppress him, then the plaintiff is entitled to recover." (Italics mine.)

It is submitted that under the above decision, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia made its decision in conflict with a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States and that since the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure prevent the inclusion of needless details, it is only necessary for the act to be set forth together with the allegation of malice on the part of the defendants-respondents.

The Questions Presented.

1. Whether or not the amended complaint (Joint App. 1) sufficiently sets forth allegations of tortious acts to support a cause of action.

2. Whether or not such acts as alleged in the amended complaint (Joint App. 1) are privileged when committed by Army Officers at a time when the Country is not at war.

3. Whether or not the statute of limitations ran in the cases of respondents Spiller and Mann who were on an active duty status in the Army of the United States from and at the time of the acts set forth, and until after the filing of the complaint.

4. Whether or not the statute of limitations ran in the cases of respondents Grayson and McCallum who were in an inactive status for more than one year prior to the filing of the complaint, in view of the fact that the petitioner was prevented from obtaining the necessary facts to support a complaint, due to the malicious and unlawful orders issued by respondents preventing those in the military service from talking to petitioner.

5. Whether or not the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia properly held that the amended complaint did not comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 8(a) when the United States District Court did not so hold and therefore the holding was not appealed.

6. Whether or not the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia properly refused to consider the two points upon which the appeal was taken: (a) whether the acts of the respondents were privileged and (b) whether the statute of limitations had run.

7. Whether or not the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia properly held that though the complaint characterizes respondents' conduct as wrongful, unlawful and malicious, it does not sufficiently disclose the conduct to enable a court to judge whether or not it was tortious.

Reasons Relied on for the Allowance of the Writ.

1. The holding of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia that petitioner's amended complaint is defective under the Federal Rules of Procedure, Rule 8(a) when this position was not taken by the lower court, has deprived petitioner of his day in court as to this point.

2. The refusal of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to pass on the points appealed upon: (a) whether the acts alleged are privileged and (b) whether the statute of limitations had run, deprives the petitioner of any rights he might have exercised to have considered the violation of petitioner's rights of free speech of having his mail reach him unopened and his right to an

open and fair trial under Articles I, II and VI of the Amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

3. The questions involved are of general importance, particularly in view of the present opposition to legislation to bring into being the much needed universal military training. It has been variously estimated—from the War Department records—that there may have been as many as up to 200,000 members of the army who have been unjustly treated in a manner similar to the treatment accorded the petitioner. Until the law is clarified, an inferior in rank is helpless in the hands of his commanding officer or commanding General.

4. The holding of the United States Court of Appeals, for the District of Columbia, it is submitted, is contrary to the holdings of the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of Dinsman v. Wilkes, reported in 7 Howard 89 and 12 Howard 390, as already pointed out.

5. The refusal of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to pass on the two points appealed is a departure from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings.

6. Since the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia refused to pass on the matter of the statute of limitations, the only decision on this matter is that of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. This court held that the statute of limitations had run as to all of the respondents, Spiller, Grayson, McCallum and Mann, whereas, in accordance with the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act of 1940, as amended, the time under the statute as to respondents Spiller and Mann had not begun to run, because these respondents were still in the active service of the Army when the complaint was filed. That part of this act which is relevant, is as follows:

Sec. 5, Section 205 of such Act *(Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940)* is amended to read as follows:

"Sec. 205. The period of Military service shall not be included in computing any period now or hereafter to be limited by any law, regulation or order for the bringing of any action or proceeding in any court, board, bureau, commission, department or other agency of government by or against any person in military service or by or against his heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns, whether such cause of action or the right or privilege to institute such action or proceeding shall have accrued prior to or during the period of such service nor shall any part of such period which occurs after the date of enactment of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act Amendments of 1942 be included in computing any period now or hereafter provided by any law for the redemption of real property sold or forfeited to enforce any obligation, tax, or assessment."

Sec. 205 (as passed in the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1941) (Approved October 17, 1940).

"Sec. 205. The period of military service shall not be included in computing any period now or hereafter to be limited by any law for the bringing of any action by or against any person in military service or by or against his heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns, whether such cause of action shall have accrued prior to or during such period of service."

Respectfully submitted,

WALTER W. BURNS,
Petitioner.

INDEX

	Page
Opinions below	1
Jurisdiction	1
Questions presented	2
Federal rules of civil procedure involved	2
Statement	4
Argument	8
Conclusion	15

CITATIONS

Cases:

American Stevedores, Inc. v. *Porello*, 330 U. S. 446	11
Carpenter v. *Wabash Ry. Co.*, 309 U. S. 23	11
Cooper v. *O'Connor*, 99 F. 2d 135, certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 643	12, 14, 15
Dawkins v. *Paulet*, L. R. 5 Q. B. 94	14
De Arnaud v. *Ainsworth*, 24 App. D. C. 167	14
Dinsman v. *Wilkes*, 7 How. 89, 12 How. 390	11, 12, 14
Edwards v. *James Stewart & Co.*, 160 F. 2d 935	12
Garland v. *Davis*, 4 How. 131	11
Hansen v. *Nicoll*, 40 App. D. C. 228	13
Jones v. *Kennedy*, 121 F. 2d 40, certiorari denied, 314 U. S. 665	12, 14
Lang v. *Wood*, 92 F. 2d 211, certiorari denied, 302 U. S. 686	12
Laughlin v. *Garnett*, 138 F. 2d 931, certiorari denied, 322 U. S. 738	14
Lewis Invisible Stitch Machine Co. v. *Columbia Blindstitch Machine Mfg. Co.*, 80 F. 2d 862	12
Meyerson v. *Hurlbut*, 98 F. 2d 232, certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 610	13
Nalle v. *Oyster*, 230 U. S. 165	12
Patterson v. *United States*, 2 Wheat. 221	11
Pollard v. *Lyon*, 91 U. S. 225	13
Renshaw v. *Renshaw*, 153 F. 2d 310	11
Spalding v. *Vilas*, 161 U. S. 483	14
Standard Nut Margarine Co. v. *Mellon*, 72 F. 2d 557, certiorari denied, 293 U. S. 605	12
State of Missouri v. *Fidelity and Casualty Co.*, 107 F. 2d 343	12
United States v. *Griffith Amusement Co.*, 1 F. R. D. 229	13
United States to the use of Parravicino v. *Brunswick*, 69 F. 2d 383	14
Vanderbank v. *Owens-Illinois Co.*, 311 U. S. 538	11

Miscellaneous:

Federal Rules of Civil Procedure:

Rule 8 (a) 2, 9, 10
Rule 8 (e) 3, 9, 10
Rule 12 (b) 3
Rule 12 (f) 3
Rule 12 (g) 4

In the Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1947

No. 305

WALTER W. BURNS, PETITIONER

v.

OLIVER L. SPILLER, ET AL.

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

BRIEF FOR THE RESPONDENTS IN OPPOSITION

OPINIONS BELOW

The memoranda and orders of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia (R. 9–12) are not reported. The opinion of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (R. 13) is reported at 161 F. 2d 377.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Court of Appeals was entered on March 24, 1947 (R. 14). A petition for rehearing was denied on May 29, 1947 (R. 15). The petition for writ of certiorari was filed on August 29, 1947. The jurisdiction of this Court is

invoked under Section 240 (a) of the Judicial Code, as amended by the Act of February 13, 1925.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether, where the district court dismissed petitioner's complaint on the ground, *inter alia*, that it contravened Rules 8(a) and 8 (e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, where there was and is no claim by petitioner that his complaint did comply with these Rules, and where his appeal to the court below was based solely on the other grounds set forth in the district court's order, the court of appeals erred in relying on the failure to comply with Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e) as the ground of its decision, and in refusing to pass on the grounds of the district court's holding from which petitioner had appealed.

2. Whether the complaint in the present case, seeking to recover damages for an alleged conspiracy among government officers and characterizing the conduct on which the conspiracy is based as wrongful, unlawful and malicious, discloses the conduct sufficiently to enable the court to judge whether it is tortious.

FEDERAL RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE INVOLVED

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provide in pertinent part:

> Rule 8. General Rules of Pleading.
>
> (a) Claims for Relief. A pleading which sets forth a claim for relief, whether

an original claim, counterclaim, cross-claim, or third-party claim, shall contain * * * (2) a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief * * *.

* * * * *

(e) Pleading to be Concise and Direct; Consistency.

(1) Each averment of a pleading shall be simple, concise, and direct. No technical forms of pleading or motions are required.

* * * * *

Rule 12. Defenses and Objections—When and How Presented—By Pleading or Motion—Motion for Judgment on Pleadings.

* * * * *

(b) How Presented. Every defense, in law or fact, to a claim for relief in any pleading, whether a claim, counterclaim, cross-claim, or third-party claim, shall be asserted in the responsive pleading thereto if one is required, except that the following defenses may at the option of the pleader be made by motion: * * * (6) failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. * * *

* * * * *

(f) Motion to Strike. Upon motion made by a party before responding to a pleading or, if no responsive pleading is permitted by these rules, upon motion made by a party within 20 days after the service

of the pleading upon him or upon the court's own initiative at any time, the court may order any redundant, immaterial, impertinent, or scandalous matter stricken from any pleading.

(g) Consolidation of Motions. A party who makes a motion under this rule may join with it the other motions herein provided for and then available to him. * * *

* * * * *

STATEMENT

On May 6, 1944, petitioner, formerly a Colonel on active duty in the Army of the United States, filed in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, a "Complaint for Conspiracy and Deprivation of Constitutional Rights" against nine defendants, all of whom, including respondents herein, were fellow army officers of comparable rank,[1] individually and as members of conspiracies against petitioner, first to have him declared insane, and later when this attempt failed, to deprive him of his constitutional rights (Tr. 1–2).[2] In the complaint, which consisted of 32 legal size typewritten pages, petitioner set out in detail the alleged conspiracies which con-

[1] Respondent Spiller was, and still is, a Brigadier General; respondent Grayson was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Medical Corps; respondent McCallum was a chaplain with rank of Lieutenant Colonel; and respondent Mann was, and still is, a Colonel.

[2] The unprinted portion of the record, which is on file with the Clerk, will be referred to as "Tr."

spiracies relate mainly to his experiences in the Army during the period from January 6, 1941 to October 10, 1941, the date when petitioner resigned (Tr. 3–32). On motion by respondents Grayson and McCallum (Tr. 34),[3] the complaint was ordered dismissed as to them, with leave granted to file an amended complaint (R. 11–12). As indicated in the memorandum accompanying the order, one of the reasons for the dismissal was that the complaint did not comply with Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which require that pleadings be simple and concise (R. 10).

Thereafter, on May 1, 1945, an "Amended Complaint for conspiracy and Deprivation of Constitutional Rights" was filed against the same defendants (R. 1). The amended complaint named as defendants the same nine army officers and alleged that the suit was brought "against the defendants individually and as members of conspiracies against plaintiff to first have plaintiff deprived of his liberty and declared insane and later when this attempt * * * failed, to deprive [him] of his liberty and other rights" under the Constitution (R. 2). The alleged conspiracies were again based on petitioner's experiences while he was in the Army in 1941. The complaint alleged that respondents "wrongfully

[3] At that time, service had been made on only these two respondents.

and maliciously" conspired (1) to have petitioner "incarcerated" in William Beaumont General Hospital at El Paso, Texas (R. 3); (2) to submit false reports for the purpose of, and the reports did have the result of, prolonging petitioner's false imprisonment (R. 3); (3) to threaten and cause petitioner to be threatened with a Class "B" Board in order that respondents might have an opportunity to attempt to have petitioner held inefficient as an army officer unless petitioner would cease attempting to have himself declared of sound mind by the medical authorities (R. 4); (4) to defame petitioner's good name and did cause to have a meeting of petitioner's officers, at which, with respondent Mann in charge, respondent McCallum falsely and maliciously stated that petitioner had committed a terrible crime (R. 4); (5) to have petitioner "put off" active duty on the false ground that he had hypertension (R. 5); (6) to have a false and malicious report published that petitioner at a dance had performed a "solo" dance (R. 5); (7) to issue a malicious and illegal written order forbidding petitioner to speak to certain civilians in El Paso, Texas (R. 5); (8) to threaten to give petitioner a secret trial at once unless petitioner resigned within twelve hours after the threat was made (R. 6); and (9) to interfere with petitioner's personal first class mail by opening it and preventing the delivery of some

of the mail to petitioner (R. 6). It was also alleged that respondents did order subordinates to "get him [petitioner] on something" (R. 3); and that respondents issued malicious and unlawful military orders preventing persons under military jurisdiction from talking to or otherwise communicating with petitioner (R. 3).

Respondents Spiller, Grayson, McCallum, and Mann, moved to strike the complaint, or in the alternative, to dismiss it on the grounds that (1) the complaint showed on its face that it was barred by the statute of limitations and (2) the complaint failed to state a cause of action on which relief might be granted (R. 7, 8).[4] The district court denied the motions to strike but granted the motions to dismiss on the same grounds as the original complaint was dismissed (R. 9). In its memorandum accompanying the order, the court stated that the amended complaint was unchanged in substance from the original complaint.

On appeal, the Court of Appeals, in a *per curiam* opinion, affirmed the district court (R. 13). It based its holding solely on the grounds (1) that the complaint contravened Rule 8 (a)

[4] Subsequent to the dismissal of the original complaint, service was made on respondents Spiller and Mann as well as respondents Grayson and McCallum. The other five respondents have not been served, nor have they appeared voluntarily. Therefore, although petitioner lists their names as respondents, they are not parties to this proceeding.

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of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure by failing to contain a "short and plain statement of the claim" and (2) that the complaint did not contain any statement showing that the petitioner was entitled to relief, since "though it characterizes [respondents'] conduct as wrongful, unlawful, and malicious, it does not sufficiently disclose the conduct to enable a court to judge whether or not it was tortious" (R. 13).

ARGUMENT

Most of the matters and questions discussed in the petition are not involved here. Petitioner admits (Pet. 7, 10–11) that in the present posture of the case there is no question involved in regard to the infringement, alleged in the complaint (R. 2), of his constitutional rights, including those of free speech. Moreover, the question "whether the statements and acts of officers of the United States are privileged, even though such statements or acts are malicious", which is the only question petitioner urges as one of general importance (Pet. 4–6) is not here in issue, for, as petitioner admits (Pet. 7, 10), the court below refrained from passing on that point (R. 13). Nor, as is clear from the opinion (R. 13) and as petitioner admits (Pet. 7, 10, 11), did the court below pass on the additional question also raised in the petition (Pet. 9), whether suit on the alleged slanderous statements was barred by the statute of limitations.

The sole questions involved are those relating to the grounds on which the court below affirmed the dismissal of the complaint, *i.e.*, whether the complaint complied with Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e), F. R. Civ. P., and whether the allegations that certain acts and conduct were "wrongful, unlawful, and malicious" is an adequate substitute for the failure otherwise sufficiently to disclose the conduct on which the action is based. The affirmance, we believe, was correct, and we submit that the decision below, based solely on questions of pleading which were correctly decided, raises no question of warranting further review by this Court.

1. There is no contention made here nor was the contention advanced in the petition for rehearing in the court below, that the complaint actually complied with Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e), F. R. Civ. P. Instead, petitioner claims that the district court did not base its decision on his failure to comply with the Rules, and that therefore the court below improperly relied on that deficiency in affirming the dismissal of his complaint. But it is clear, contrary to petitioner's contention (Pet. 7, 10), that the district court did hold that the complaint contravened Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e). The original complaint consisted of 32 legal size typewritten pages and was made up largely of evidentiary matter (Tr. 1–32). On respondents' motion, the district court dis-

missed that complaint with leave to file an amended complaint, on the ground, *inter alia,* that the complaint contravened Rules 8 (a) and 8 (e), (R. 10, 11). Subsequently, an amended complaint—the one here involved—was filed. Respondents again moved to dismiss, or in the alternative, to strike, the amended complaint (R. 7, 8). The district court granted the motion to dismiss, again indicating as one of the grounds of the dismissal that the complaint failed to comply with Rule 8 (a).[5] It stated (R. 9):

> Plaintiff in preparing his amended complaint has made an effort to comply with Rule 8 (a) and Rule 8 (e) Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. A comparison of the amended complaint with the original complaint reveals no change in substance.

The court below obviously understood the district court to have grounded its dismissal of the complaint on the failure to comply with Rules 8 (a)

[5] The denial of the motion to strike does not support petitioner's contention that the district court did not hold that the complaint contravened Rule 8 (a) (Pet. 10). Respondents in their motions were not requesting the court both to strike and to dismiss but rather presented these motions as alternatives (R. 7, 8). Moreover, a motion to strike is inconsistent with a motion to dismiss, and therefore the court could not have granted both. Hence, since the district court's action was based on additional deficiencies in petitioner's pleadings which deficiencies are more properly disposed of by dismissal of the complaint, the court properly granted the motion to dismiss, while denying the motion to strike.

and 8 (e), and hence, by affirming that holding, merely ruled that the district court's holding was not so clearly erroneous as to require reversal. *Renshaw* v. *Renshaw,* 153 F. 2d 310 (App. D. C.).

Nor is there any merit to petitioner's related contention that the court below erred in so limiting its holding and thereby not passing on the two points which petitioner specifically appealed. An appellate court clearly is not bound to pass on the points appealed by an appellant if there are adequate other grounds on which to dispose of the case. It has long been settled law that when a cause may be disposed of on a number of grounds, the court has discretion to select one or more of them on which to base its opinion, and is not limited to either the grounds on which a lower court based its holding nor the points on which an appeal is taken. *Patterson* v. *United States,* 2 Wheat. 221, 224; *Garland* v. *Davis,* 4 How. 131, 143; cf. *American Stevedores, Inc.* v. *Porello,* 330 U. S. 446; *Vanderbank* v. *Owens-Illinois Co.,* 311 U. S. 538; *Carpenter* v. *Wabash Ry. Co.,* 309 U. S. 23.

2. Petitioner's contention (Pet. 7, 11) that the court failed to give proper effect to *Dinsman* v. *Wilkes,* 7 How. 89, 12 How. 390, in holding that although the complaint characterized respondents' "alleged conduct as wrongful, unlawful, and malicious, it does not sufficiently disclose the conduct to enable a court to judge whether or not it was

tortious" is likewise unsound. In so holding, the court below did not deny that as a matter of substantive law a government officer might, in certain circumstances, be liable for tortious acts, but it ruled that, as a matter of pleading, general allegations of "wrongful, unlawful, and malicious" are not sufficient alone to disclose the conduct on which the complaint is based. The *Dinsman* case dealt with the substantive right to recover for tortious action of government officers; it did not consider how properly to frame a complaint seeking such recovery.

Furthermore, it is settled that, as matter of pleading, general allegations of malice and bad faith add nothing to a complaint seeking damages for conspiracy and tortious conduct of public officials. *Lang* v. *Wood,* 92 F. 2d 211, 212 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 302 U. S. 686; *Standard Nut Margarine Co.* v. *Mellon,* 72 F. 2d 557 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 293 U. S. 605; *Jones* v. *Kennedy,* 121 F. 2d 40, 45 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 314 U. S. 665. Nor does the allegation of conspiracy aid petitioner in stating a claim, since the gist of a civil action for conspiracy is the overt or tortious act complained of (*Nalle* v. *Oyster,* 230 U. S. 165; *Edwards* v. *James Stewart & Co.,* 160 F. 2d 935 (App. D. C.); *Cooper* v. *O'Connor,* 99 F. 2d 135, 142 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 643; *State of Missouri* v. *Fidelity and Casualty Co.,* 107 F. 2d 343 (C. C. A. 8); *Lewis*

Invisible Stitch Machine Co. v. *Columbia Blindstitch Machine Mfg. Co.*, 80 F. 2d 862 (C. C. A. 2); *Hansen* v. *Nicoll*, 40 App. D. C. 228), and the sole function of the conspiracy allegation is to connect the various respondents to the tortious act, once such act had been alleged.[6] Cf. *United States* v. *Griffith Amusement Co.*, 1 F. R. D. 229 (W. D. Okla.).

Absent these allegations, the complaint clearly did not state a claim upon which relief can be granted. In the first place, there is nothing in the complaint indicating that petitioner suffered any injury or damage as a result of the acts and statements complained of.[7] Secondly, at the time of the episodes described in the complaint, petitioner and all the respondents were Army officers.

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[6] The complaint here is deficient in this respect as well since in all his allegations petitioner uses "defendants" as a generic term including all the respondents, and there is no particular act alleged connecting each of the respondents with the conspiracy. *United States* v. *Griffith Amusement Co.*, 1 F. R. D. 229 (W. D. Okla.).

[7] For instance, petitioner alleged that a statement had been falsely made that he had "committed a terrible crime" (R. 4), and that a false newspaper report had been published that he "had, at a dance, performed a 'solo dance'" (R. 5). Neither of these statements would be actionable *per se*. The first was merely a conclusion by the speaker as to the nature of the crime, and plainly had no necessary connotation that petitioner had committed a crime involving moral turpitude. Cf. *Pollard* v. *Lyon*, 91 U. S. 225; *Meyerson* v. *Hurlbut*, 98 F. 2d 232 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 610. The second, respecting the solo dance, had no defamatory connotation.

There is no allegation in the complaint that any of the acts or statements complained of were "manifestly or palpably" beyond the scope of respondents' official authority. *Spalding* v. *Vilas,* 161 U. S. 483, 498; *Cooper* v. *O'Connor,* 99 F. 2d 135, 138, 139 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 643. As a matter of substantive law, it is clear that government officials may be held personally liable only for acts which are manifestly and palpably beyond their authority, and that notwithstanding *Dinsman* v. *Wilkes, supra,* motive for so acting is immaterial where the act complained of is within the scope of the official's authority. *Spalding* v. *Vilas,* 161 U. S. 483; *De Arnaud* v. *Ainsworth,* 24 App. D. C. 167; *Cooper* v. *O'Connor,* 99 F. 2d 135 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 305 U. S. 643, and cases there cited; *Jones* v. *Kennedy,* 121 F. 2d 40 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 314 U. S. 665; *Laughlin* v. *Garnett,* 138 F. 2d 931 (App. D. C.), certiorari denied, 322 U. S. 738. The reason given for this rule of immunity is simply one of public policy. "Otherwise the perfect freedom which ought to exist in discharge of public duty might be seriously restrained, and often to the detriment of the public service." *De Arnaud* v. *Ainsworth,* 24 App. D. C. 167, 178; *United States to the use of Parravicino* v. *Brunswick,* 69 F. 2d 383, 386 (App. D. C.); *Cooper* v. *O'Connor, supra,* at 141–142; cf. *Dawkins* v. *Paulet,* L. R. 5 Q. B. 94, 114. Petitioner's com-

plaint may well be analogized to that of "the private in the rear rank" whose life is made miserable by the "hard-boiled top sergeant" (cf. *Cooper* v. *O'Connor, supra,* 99 F. 2d at 142). We submit that petitioner in his complaint had stated no greater claim upon which relief could be granted.

CONCLUSION

The decision below is correct, there is no conflict with any applicable decision of this Court, and no question warranting further review is presented. The petition for a writ of certiorari should therefore be denied.

Respectfully submitted.

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